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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the findings of a national conference on mentoring. Mentoring involves a structured relationship between two people, with the first imparting support, insight, and experience to the second. The following varieties of mentoring are discussed: (1) mentoring from the business community; (2) career mentoring within specific groups; (3) mentoring situations that demand specialized training; (4) mentoring within educational settings; (5) mentoring on the basis of language, culture, gender, or ethnic groups; (6) special needs or focus programs; (7) group mentoring; (8) youth-to-youth or peer mentoring; and (9) cross-age or intergenerational mentoring. The following realistic expectations of mentoring are outlined: (1) programs need to be linked to the greater community in order to be effective; (2) at-risk youth should be the primary target; (3) new programs should be based on the expertise of existing programs; (4) evaluations, research, and goal-setting must be pragmatically oriented and client focused; (5) mentoring can support students without being a burden for the school system; (6) mentoring should be viewed as a "strategy for success," not a "cure for ills"; and (7) the mentor often derives as much from the relationship as the student does. Recommendations concerning the role of government in mentoring programs and suggestions for a national association for mentoring are made. A list of the members of the conference planning committee and a list of the participants are appended. (FMW)

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TURNING POINT

A WHITE PAPER ON THE COURSE OF MENTORING

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ONE PLUS ONE

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PREFACE

Society's best investment is in its future: its young.

This report is a distillation of the expertise and experience of many persons. It is a compilation of the views of 150 leaders of various organizations who came together on March 27 and 28, 1990 in Washington, D.C.

The subject is mentoring, which is not a new idea but one that can be traced back to Homeric legend. Mentoring is a natural phenomenon in life that most of us have experienced, in that we have had the benefit of at least one, or perhaps several, mentors — persons who made a significant difference in our lives by their caring and interest in us.

But while the concept is hardly new, there is a new concern about the general prospects for mentoring and whether the values of mentoring can be preserved and expanded in the years ahead. There was a consensus among the conference participants that the growing desire of recent years to extend mentoring to those who are not presently benefiting from it is, in itself, a turning point.

Three factors were identified by participants as reasons for concern. First, the traditional sources of mentors—the family, schools, churches, neighborhoods—are all experiencing other increasing burdens that tax their abilities to respond to many societal needs. Secondly, mentoring can be instrumental in preparing the workforce of the future, beset as it is by ever-newer technology and the growing number of interconnections within the world economy. And thirdly, the utility of mentoring is an idea that has been growing among some areas of society that had not been persuaded of this before—for example, the government and business.

This white paper reflects the conference participants' common thinking and examines the options, issues and opportunities for mentoring in the 90's.

INTRODUCTION

A DESCRIPTIVE DEFINITION

Conference participants described mentoring as a natural process: someone handing over to another in a sustained, supportive relationship whatever wisdom, counsel and caring life has bequeathed. We can experience it, we can recognize it, we can sense its absence. We can find it in dozens of relationships and sense in our own lives the difference it can make. It lies somewhere between parenting and friendship—though it can also include them or go beyond them. A mentor may or may not come from one's own family.

Margaret Mahoney, president of the Commonwealth Fund, in the Fund's 1983 annual report, speaks of mentoring as an objective sort of love—even though it is not always based on a natural affinity. Most of us will remember among those who have taught us someone we did not especially, or at least initially, like. And, though mentoring shares many of the traits of friendship, and can develop into friendship, its focus is often directed to a particular skill to be learned, an issue to be examined, or some other specific problem to be solved.

SOME HISTORY

The conference participants noted that society has traditionally offered mentors for most of us, whether through the extended family, or from the neighborhood, or at the workplace, or in school, or in church. But they have not always provided mentors for everyone—and they do so less and less today.

Organizations around the country—from national groups such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters, or local ones such as the BUDDY SYSTEM of Minneapolis—have over many years provided structured opportunities for mentoring. They have proven to be remarkably and demonstrab-

ly effective in the lives of individuals.

But the capacities of such groups are now being overwhelmed by the increasing number of circumstances where it is thought that mentoring might be useful. Lack of sufficient mentors has always been a problem. It continues to grow more troublesome. The tragic result is that those who are now identified as most in need of mentors are least likely to have them.

Who needs mentoring and is not being served? The statistics are clear. The U.S. General Accounting Office has estimated that in 1987 some 14 percent of high school students do not reach graduation. Dropout rates are higher for Hispanics, African Americans and the economically disadvantaged. And the dropout rate is growing for all groups. The Institute for Educational Leadership predicts a national dropout rate of 40 percent by the year 2000. The statistics are especially dramatic when compared to those of our international competitors in Japan and Germany where even more difficult high school curricula do not deter over 90 percent of students from successful graduation.

In the last four years, PLUS (Project Literacy U.S.) has sought to muster the forces of literacy—media, literacy providers, educators, business people—to work together on the literacy portion of the national need to improve the education of young people. This grassroots effort, capitalizing on the mass media's ability to stir national consciousness, has shown encouraging success. The U.S. Department of Education credits PLUS with a 109 percent increase in the number of volunteer literacy tutors.

In the last year, PLUS has turned its focus to mentoring. That decision was based in part on many sources of evidence such as the finding of the National Forum on Youth at Risk that mentoring is one of the most effective ways to help at-risk youth. It was also based on Margaret Mahoney's observation that "whether or not young persons succeed depends in great part on individuals who help them establish values and who inspire effort." And it is based on such findings as that of the General Accounting Office's report, *School Dropouts: A Survey of Local Problems*, that, while personal attention is critical to

success, many students receive less than ten minutes a day of individual attention from their teachers. PLUS began its One PLUS One effort to make the nation aware of the power and importance of mentoring.

The next step was a National Mentoring Conference.

The Conference called together organizations most able to address the problems on a national basis. It was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, under the direction of Secretary of Labor Elizabeth Dole. This paper is the result of that conference.

Acknowledgement

We gratefully acknowledge the participation of the following individuals as facilitators at the National Mentoring Conference. Their leadership in, and written reports of, the dialogues at the Conference are the core and substance of this paper and provide the foundation on which it is based.

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Forms Of Mentoring

Mentoring—as we use the term—involves a structured relationship between two people with the first imparting to the second, to the degree possible, support, insight and experience.

Among the varieties of programs and mentoring needs represented and discussed were:

- **Mentoring from the business community:** Introducing the young to the world of work, engaging them in the responsibilities and the rewards that a job well done can bring into one's life, broadening awareness of career and life opportunities, and promoting the notion that we are all interdependent.
- **Career mentoring within specific groups such as professions or businesses:** Job training or, more specifically, fostering a protege. Thus, someone would introduce and guide a novice in a specific field. This would extend to active learning about such a field with a view to joining it.
- **Mentoring situations that demand specialized training:** Training for literacy or specialized skills or tasks in and out of the professional situation and imparting a specific skill with enough person-to-person support and caring to achieve success.
- **Mentoring within educational settings:** Perhaps encouraging someone in school, sharing difficulties and delighting in success, or perhaps tutoring someone in a specific subject. This can be done in concert with the educational system or, in some situations, outside of it.
- **Language, culture, gender, or ethnic groups:** Some felt strongly that it is essential that youth have mentors with whom they can identify; yet others felt that it is instructive for youth to see alternate approaches to life so that this might broaden their

horizons (within this was the enrichment potential for the mentor).

- **Special needs or focus programs:** Groups with a purpose that is more specific or that share a common bond, such as the disabled. The need is for role models who share the same life difficulties and have developed coping skills to go beyond them.
- **"Group mentoring":** There are not always a sufficient number of mentors available (Big Brothers/Big Sisters has a waiting list of thirty to forty thousand youth across the nation). Nor is it always possible to find the right "mix" of mentor/mentee within a given situation. Thus, it is possible and sometimes necessary to have one mentor involved with several mentees; this might be expanded to incorporate peer mentoring.
- **Youth-to-youth or peer mentoring:** This can be found within and outside of the school systems and colleges. Many felt that the possibilities in this area need further exploration and development but show much promise.
- **"Cross-age" or intergenerational mentoring:** This idea suggests that the roles of mentor/mentee are not necessarily always separable; that the very young might provide suitable mentor relationships with the very old; that the relationship, in order to be most successful, must be based on the sense that each has something to give.

This list might include some special relationships as might be found, for example, in coaching (vocal, athletic). Any and/or all of these groups might be integrated within a given mentoring situation. Similarly, as a person goes through the various stages of life, a different sort of relationship might be called for both on the part of the mentor and the mentee. Finally, a sub-group within all of these might be those who have gone through a mentoring experience and wish—as quite often happens—to continue the chain and give to another what has been received.

This list indicates that often people are enriched by

several kinds of mentors, several different mentors, and both structured and unstructured relationships.

Mentoring is as varied as people are. It is limiting to prescribe too closely what every mentoring relationship might be. Thus the theme developed at the conference is that mentoring is inclusive and not exclusive—that to be successful mentoring must be collaborative and incorporate all segments of society.

THEME

The Conference participants felt strongly that there are many forms of mentoring and each must be recognized, validated, and supported. No group can declare that its and only its method is the one, true way. Each must recognize its interdependence, and be willing to give and receive the support of other groups. Each must recognize its limitations and be willing to accept that another might fill in where it is deficient and be willing to extend support and cooperation.

They felt that this is especially pertinent since the nation is growing in its awareness of the need for mentoring, its power, and its availability — and this awareness will grow to be more profound as media continue to focus attention on it.

A concrete instance of the interdependence in life that mentoring addresses — that of the business and educational communities — is shown by the remarks of Dr. Lester C. Thurow, dean of the Sloan School of Management of M.I.T. In his speech, "Corporate Success and the Changing World," given at The Planning Forum's 1990 International Conference in Washington, D.C. Dr. Thurow spoke of what the United States must do to remain competitive in the coming century.

He points out that *average workers* on gigabyte semiconductor chips will need to have training in statistical quality control. They will need to have training in operations research. They will need to have skills in mathematics. The future — and the present — demand a broad and solid education, the components of which might then be adapted to any situation or set of variables. We must in effect have an educated, and well-educated, workforce. No longer can we pretend that low — or "high enough" — literacy skills are acceptable in the workplace.

Secretary Dole is challenging business nationwide to engage 10% of its workforce in mentoring. Within a given

area, there might be too many mentors. Yet, just down the street or across town another group may be languishing for lack of support. A willingness to cooperate among groups will make sure that all young people in need of mentoring can find help and that each mentor will be used to the best advantage. Mentoring's focus is not merely providing a workforce but rather helping individuals better their entire lives and society itself. We are beginning to realize that the problems of one segment of society are the problems of all of society. The entire educational system — and not just parts of it — must be raised to a higher level. No longer can we afford to make the distinctions between reading and math skills. No longer can we afford to make the distinctions between educational quality and life quality. All of these are integrated — and, for all to function best, must be integrated.

However, it must always be kept in mind that mentoring is not a panacea for society's ills; it cannot attempt or be expected to take over society's duties and responsibilities. Mentoring is a caring, supportive *fostering* process. Therefore, the Conference participants thought it wise to examine the realistic expectations that can be made of mentoring and of those who will support it.

Realistic Expectations

The participants felt that awareness of what mentoring is and is not must be communicated broadly (particularly with government/corporate decision makers). Mentoring — which is a popular idea at the moment — must not be seen as a "cheap fix" or a "substitute for funding of social services" nor as the "primary tool" for repairing society's ills.

They stated that mentoring needs clear missions and goals by which to be evaluated. The diversity of mentoring should be recognized by any nationwide collaborative. Thus "outcomes," conference participants said, would be defined "in a manner which addresses disparate program objectives." A sense of realistic expectations would emphasize the usefulness of interdependence among mentoring organizations and society.

Thus some realistic expectations are:

- programs linked to the greater community are more effective (for example: in-school youth can be cooperatively served by school staff, community-based organizations, local government and parents working together.)

- mentoring often deals exclusively with youth at risk of dropping out of school. Many felt that it is incumbent to get to those youth before they end up on the street.

- it is both realistic and most efficient not to seek to "re-invent the wheel." Use must be made of the expertise in existing programs.

- any evaluations, research, or goal-setting must be "pragmatically oriented" and "client focused"

because the relationship that works brings both parties to a fuller realization of themselves.

- mentoring can be a support for an individual who is in a school program and not a burden for the school system to support. The focus is the cooperative, team aspect of the effort.

- mentoring should be viewed as a "strategy for success," not as the "cure for ills."

- that the mentor often derives as much from the relationship as does the student.

QUESTIONS

Among the many questions and issues posed were the following:

Business and Industry need to define what their roles are and who within business is to play them. Some might find more success and satisfaction in tutoring or a simple "being there" relationship. Others might be more at ease and more successful in fostering specific skills. Likewise, different sizes and levels of business might find different roles to play—from sponsorship of whole organizations to one-to-one apprenticeships or providing in-kind services. Businesses themselves in concert with the mentoring organizations can identify these questions and the best answers to them.

Higher education can bring many skills to the process. Research. Evaluation. Assessment. Training. Materials. Individuals may find a variety of roles that are satisfying. One professor, for example, might find greatest satisfaction in monitoring mentors. Another might find greater satisfaction in being a mentor.

Private and public schools can integrate mentoring in their systems. Faculty and students both can be involved.

Families and mentoring programs can work to perceive their relationships not in opposition to one another, but rather as complementary, associative, and distinct entities. How might both parties work together to aid youth?

Media's usefulness needs to be examined by each mentoring group and by mentoring as a movement. The media have the capacity to develop national awareness of an issue. Were the media to make use of their capacity to raise the number of mentoring volunteers and there were not procedures in place to use these people, the result might be worse than a shortage of volunteers.

Such questions arose, too, with respect to religious organizations, ethnic groups, youth service organiza-

tions, community-based organizations, and local and state governments. All, it was pointed out, must ask themselves, and mentoring groups must ask themselves, what the nature of the roles is to be. Each will want to preserve its own rightful autonomy and its own structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

An extensive list of recommendations was made at the conference. No single organization, nor even a national network, can handle all of them. However, each can choose those tasks that can best be accomplished. Among the recommendations were:

I. With respect to government — mentoring relationships:

- Encourage that mentoring be included in the development of policy and programs.
- Develop public awareness of mentoring through legislation and lobbying.
- Provide public funding where appropriate.
- Communicate awareness of what mentoring is and is not.
- Coordinate the flow of information through the many layers of government.
- Encourage business to provide release time for its workers to serve as mentors.
- Foster federal leadership in convening and supporting on-going meetings such as the National Mentoring Conference.
- Encourage research through federal funding to investigate the variables for success and failure of mentoring.

- Examine the viability of government employees serving as mentors.
- Avoid such terms as at-risk-youth which brand youth as problems to be solved.

II. Concerning a national association:

- Develop a national resource center with a centralized library, information, and program resources.
- Provide training materials and programs.
- Provide a vehicle for the development of collaborative strategies involving all levels and aspects of society.
- Develop a national awareness about such issues as cross-racial, ethnic, cultural, and generational sensitivity and about the dangers and opportunities in cross-gender matching.
- Share research and successful models of mentoring, thus preventing duplication of efforts.
- Consider the danger that a national organization not dilute creativity or try to direct a local focus.
- Adapt training materials and standards to local programs.
- Provide a data base of mentoring organizations and programs and/or publish a directory regularly.
- Replicate the best from those programs already in existence so time, money, and effort can be more effectively utilized.

- Encourage the involvement of other organizations such as foster parent programs, the juvenile justice system, and ethnic and minority rights groups.

- Provide technical assistance in such areas as the development of forms, analysis of data, and evaluations.

- Develop a national philosophy of mentoring as a common ground for all of society to work together.

- Provide the basic tools with which the local programs could work effectively with the media to enhance awareness and effectiveness.

In all of the discussions there was a concern about overdevelopment at the national level that could inhibit or even stifle local efforts. Some activities can be most successfully done on the national level, but the actual work of mentoring is essentially a local task.

Operational Issues

Several issues arose at the conference that still need to be clarified, such as a standardized screening process for mentors and insurance which might well become a major issue in the event of charges of molestation and abuse. Models are needed to help local mentoring groups meet with business, encourage its participation, point out how it is in business's economic interest to become involved, and best utilize business people.

Consideration should be given to those individuals or organizations that want to help, but not necessarily in a direct mentoring capacity. The mentoring effort should not turn away any kind of effective support system.

A speakers' bureau might be set up with listings by particular group interests. Similarly, individuals who have had success with mentoring should be able to share their insights with a broad audience through the media.

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